

japantoday

Friday, July 6, 2007

Throwing money at Afghanistan not wise

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More than 60 countries and international organizations sent their delegates to a two-day Afghan reconstruction conference in Tokyo this week. According to estimates by the United Nations, Afghanistan may need \$1.7 billion for reconstruction in the first year, and \$4.9 billion over the next two and a half years.

Afghanistan is close to bankruptcy. Millions of Afghans have lost their homes. Over six million Afghans are reportedly completely dependent on food aid. Interim Afghan leader Hamid Karzai came to the conference and literally became a beggar: He said he was hoping to return home with "full hands."



Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi pledged to provide Afghanistan with up to \$250 million worth of aid in the first year and an additional \$250 million in the second year. The United States was planning to offer \$296 million and the European Union \$5 million respectively in the first year. All together, the international community has earmarked over \$1.8 billion until the end of 2002 and \$4.9 billion over the next two years.

In comparison, Japan pledged up to \$200 million in assistance to Cambodia in 1992 and \$120 million for East Timor. Japan's aid to Afghanistan has already eclipsed these, and the Afghans' requests for assistance will continue for a long time.

According to Koizumi, Japan's assistance primarily focuses on the issues of refugees, education, health care, women's status, and landmine removal.

Is Japan's aid appropriate? No. The international community seems to be competing in an aid-giving race. The European Union, the United States and Japan are trying to take the initiative in Afghan reconstruction by donating substantial amounts of assistance.

Since the United States has had an overwhelming military presence in Afghanistan, it does not have to become the top contributor. In order to maintain influence over development in Afghanistan, such neighboring countries as Iran, Pakistan and India announced surprisingly large amounts of aid.

Unfortunately, this international aid commitment will create a dependent relationship between the aid-providing countries and Afghanistan which tends to take international assistance for granted. It has lost its sense of independence derived from improving its living conditions by itself. Karzai requested specifically that creditor countries should write off debts so that Afghanistan can make a new start from scratch.

A leader of an independent nation should not become a beggar. Afghanistan cannot make any true new start without fulfilling the promises it has made. Requesting the elimination of debts is wrong. Afghanistan

will lose its credibility, making it difficult to borrow money for its development in the future, and prevent the nation from standing on its own feet in the near future.

Afghanistan has been suffering from civil war for a long time. If Afghans wish to rebuild their country, they should not depend on external assistance but unite for their reconstruction. With \$4.9 billion flowing into Afghanistan, Afghans will certainly fight among themselves over how to spend it. If the international community wants to avoid that situation, it will have to control the way the money is used, which in turn will deprive Afghanistan of its autonomy.

Japan and the international community should provide Afghanistan with the very minimum humanitarian aid without getting involved in a contest to maintain influence over Afghanistan's future course of development. Afghanistan's reconstruction may take longer, but in the long run, Afghanistan will certainly acquire autonomous independence.

Heaven helps those who help themselves.

January 23, 2002

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